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Liberty for Us, Limits for Them: Christian Nationalism and Americans' Views on Citizens' Rights

Joshua T. Davis*
University of New Hampshire, USA

Samuel L. Perry
University of Oklahoma, USA

Joshua B. Grubbs
Bowling Green State University, USA

Americans are often split along partisan and religious lines regarding which claims they consider "rights," as well as which of these rights they prioritize over others. Beyond standard political and religious characteristics, we propose that a pervasive ideology that centers conservative religious ethno-culture within America's deep story and future—Christian nationalism—plays a central role in shaping how Americans evaluate "rights." Analyses drawn from a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults show Christian nationalism is a leading predictor that Americans prioritize gun rights, religious freedom, and states' rights, but deprioritize freedom of speech, the press, right to a speedy and fair trial, and protection from unlawful searches or seizures. Further analyses indicate Christian nationalism is the strongest predictor that Americans view voting as a privilege, not a right. Findings suggest Christian nationalism may incline Americans to support rights more suited to the continuance of the current social order and maintenance of power structures, while also making them less likely to support rights traditionally associated with challenging these structures.

Key words: guns, civil society, rights, Christian nationalism, authoritarian, voting.

INTRODUCTION

A considerable amount of contemporary cultural and political debate in the United States is over the interpretation and recognition of "rights," or that to

*Direct correspondence to Joshua T. Davis, University of New Hampshire, Sociology Department, 15 Academic Way, McConnell Hall, Durham, NH 03824, USA. E-mail: profjoshdavis@gmail.com

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which Americans are morally and legally entitled as human beings (in the case of human rights) or citizens (Gran 2021; Hoffman 2012; Mencken and Froese 2019). Research seeking to explore how and why differences of interpretation or understanding of these "rights," such as "freedom of speech" or "freedom of religion," among Americans has consistently identified cultural framing and group centrism as salient factors. Cultural scripts, or "frames," often act in an iterative process in which ostensibly clear and enumerated civic rights are contextualized not by their legal precedent, but by group-oriented understandings of whether a specific "right" should or should not be supported based upon who is believed to benefit from it (Nelson and Kinder 1996). In other words, the framing of a right as more beneficial to in-group members are likely to be prioritized, while those that tend to be more important to out-groups are likely to be deemphasized. Further, Americans' subjective understanding of both the definition and application of civic rights serve more often as symbolic assertions of group values and beliefs than objective knowledge of how enumerated rights are applied and maintained in daily life (Djupe et al. 2014). Put more simply, citizens' support or opposition to protections and rights outlined in the Constitution are heavily influenced by group loyalty and cultural narratives. Among the leading factors shaping how Americans evaluate what they consider to be rights or which rights they prioritize—specifically those framed as issues concerning individual liberty or minority protection—including political partisanship and educational attainment, is religion (Breskaya et al. 2018; Djupe et al. 2014; Ellison et al. 2021; Lewis 2017; Mayrl 2018).

Traditionally, scholars have argued that religion operates to provide a cohesive theological narrative undergirding group support for rights such as freedom of religion or freedom of speech. Yet beyond traditional measures of religious identity, commitment, theological conservatism, or political ideology, recent scholarship has identified a "public dimension of religious commitment" (Stewart et al. 2018:33) that operates differently from indicators of private religious behavior or belief. This dimension seems oriented around "social order" or "public life" in a way that conflates sectarian Protestant ideals about in-group loyalty, hierarchies, and traditionalist morals with American history, identity, and policy (Gorski and Perry 2022). Though different labels such as "public religious expression" (Stewart et al. 2018) and "tribal civil religion" (Williams and Fuist 2014) have been used, the more common term that now seems to transcend disciplines is "Christian nationalism" (Al-Kire et al. 2021, 2022; Armaly et al. 2022; Braunstein 2021; Corcoran et al. 2021; McDaniel et al. 2011). Put simply, Christian nationalism is a social and cultural framework which seeks to marry a heavily constrained vision of Christianity to American civic life and polity such that conservative, predominantly white Evangelicalism establishes and maintains a position of explicit privilege in American society.

Within the burgeoning research on Christian nationalist ideology, scholars have consistently found the construct to be associated with insistence on certain kinds of "liberty" such as religious liberty, gun rights, libertarian economic policies,

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or liberty to expose oneself to COVID-19 (Adler et al. 2021; Perry et al. 2021; Perry et al. 2022; Whitehead et al. 2018), while minimizing the liberty of others and emphasizing formal means of social control (Armaly et al. 2022; Davis 2018; Davis and Perry 2021; Perry et al. 2022). Indeed, Christian nationalism itself reflects this contradiction in that its adherents would insist that the government cannot "limit the free exercise of" Christians; yet it is powerfully associated with Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and anti-atheist sentiment (Whitehead and Perry 2020a). Similarly, it seeks to elevate and institutionalize Christian identity above others, while also sacralizing the founding documents that clearly forbid Congress from passing laws "respecting an establishment of religion" (Gorski and Perry 2022).

In an effort to elucidate these apparent contradictions, we draw on recent, nationally representative data to examine the association between Christian nationalist ideology and various rights and protections outlined in the Constitution. Specifically, we evaluate Americans' identification of the "most important" among seven options drawn from the American Bill of Rights, which include (1) freedom of speech, (2) freedom of the press, (3) freedom of religion, (4) the right to a speedy and fair trial, (5) the right to keep and bear arms, (6) rights not outlined as going to the federal government go to the states, and (7) protection against unlawful searches or seizures. Building on insights from research on Christian nationalism and desires for more stringent social control among Americans, we anticipate Christian nationalist ideology would be associated Americans' support for the rights most closely associated with historical majority groups, especially those rights framed as necessary for the maintenance of traditional power structures including the freedom of religion and the right to bear arms. Further, we would expect Christian nationalism to be negatively associated with protections for vulnerable groups perceived as threats such as crime suspects. Finally, we would anticipate Christian nationalism to deprioritize rights that provide opportunities to criticize or overturn power and which may upset social order including the freedom of the press or the view that voting is a fundamental right and not a civic privilege. In light of prior literature demonstrating the salience of Christian nationalist ideology above and beyond measures of social and political conservatism, we would expect these relationships to hold even when subjected to an extensive battery of sociopolitical and demographic control measures.

BACKGROUND AND EXPECTATIONS

Politics, Religion, and "Rights" in the United States

Sociologists and political scientists interested in the understanding and application of rights outlined and protected by the Constitution among the general population find that there are myriad sociopolitical influences at play. Research on how Americans evaluate "rights" often shows that persons who are more politically and theologically conservative are likelier to favor more circumscribed definitions of "rights" while prioritizing rights that maximize the liberty of the

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in-group, including the liberty of the in-group to defend itself from cultural, economic, or political threats (see review in Davis and Perry 2021). As political theorist Corey Robinson (2016:8) explains, this tendency is fundamental to the conflict between conservatism and liberalism.

> *Though it is often claimed that the left stands for equality while the right stands for freedom, this notion misstates the disagreement between right and left. Historically, the conservative has favored liberty for the higher orders and constraint for the lower orders. What the conservative sees and dislikes in equality, in other words, is not a threat to freedom but its extension. For in that extension, he sees the loss of his own freedom.*

Political conservatism, in part, can thus be understood as a movement to maximize in-group liberty and control threats to that liberty. So too can conservative religion often function as broad marker of ethno-cultural identity, justifier of the social status quo, and foundation for beliefs about cultural or moral "purity" (Adler et al. 2021; Rawls 1972). It is consequently a key mechanism for identifying and distinguishing outsiders and constraining privileges, rights, and protections available to them. Unsurprisingly then, Schwadel and Garneau (2019) find evidence that affiliation with evangelical denominations, and a literalist interpretation of the Bible is associated with lesser willingness to allow full freedom of speech to marginalized out-groups. Similarly, Eisenstein et al. (2017) demonstrate that, while evangelical Protestants have increased in political tolerance toward stigmatized groups since the 1980s, they remain consistently less willing to extend free speech than are mainline Protestant or Catholic respondents net of salient political and social indicators of intolerance.

Far from simply acting as a marker of which rights Americans are more inclined to *restrict*, however, sociologists and political scientists have demonstrated that religion also helps us understand which rights Americans *support*. Gun ownership (Mencken and Froese 2019; Stroope and Tom 2017; Yamane 2016), expansive police powers and desires for more stringent social control (Thompson and Froese 2016; see also Baker and Booth 2016), and support for broadly defined "freedoms" associated with conservative or libertarian ideologies (Braunstein and Taylor 2017; Marti 2020) are all frequently couched within a religious framework in political and social discourse. Lewis (2017) describes the recent decades as a "rights turn" among conservative religious groups who now articulate their political agenda to preserve their cultural influence while marginalizing others in terms of "religious liberty" or "religious freedom" (see also Mayrl 2018; Mayrl and Venny 2021). Furthermore, Braunstein and Taylor's (2017) research indicates that religio-political appeals undergird claims that some conscribed set of rights are god-ordained even among the irreligious, suggesting that rhetorical strategies sacralizing some freedoms over others may be more important for understanding American political beliefs than religious belonging or practice per se. Such studies highlight the need for research outlining the sustained and transformative role of religious influences in American civic life (Adler et al. 2021; Delehanty et al. 2019; Stewart et al. 2018; Williams and Fuist 2014).

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Christian Nationalism, Civic Belonging, and Rights

In what is now both an expansive and growing literature exploring the role of Christian nationalism in American politics, evidence shows that as a person more intimately intertwines "Christian" identity with being "truly American," their concept of who is deserving of protection and privileges within society becomes more constrained. Specifically, Gorski and Perry (2022) contend that Christian nationalism provides cultural narratives in the form of a "deep story" which simultaneously mythologizes the role of Christianity in the founding of America and in the framing of national institutions and traditions. This story, they contend, acts as a framework through which Christian nationalists understand the past and examine the present such that legacies of social and structural stratification are often obfuscated, and efforts to highlight and critique these injustices are resisted (Perry, Whitehead, and Davis 2019; Perry and Whitehead 2019; Perry, Whitehead, and Grubbs 2022). In effect, then, the cultural framework of Christian nationalism constructs a narrow view of what it means to be a "real" or "true" American. As one might expect, this framework tends to be most salient among Americans who are less educated, white, Southern, and evangelical (Whitehead and Perry 2020a). And while Christian nationalism is commonly associated with political and social positions that are popular among conservatives and Republicans, scholars have consistently found that Christian nationalism's influence remains salient even when controlling for respondents' political ideology. In sum, these studies indicate that Christian nationalism operates both in concert with and independently from political ideology to inform Americans' social and political attitudes, and is often a factor in the aspects of American civic life Americans support, as well as those which they oppose.

As a consequence of this narrower sense of civic belonging, Christian nationalism tends to elevate attitudes that are more closely aligned with the maintenance of a more "traditionalist" image of social order both formally and symbolically (Davis 2018; Whitehead and Perry 2019; Perry and Whitehead 2022). Davis (2018), for example, finds that Christian nationalists are likelier to emphasize the use of strict or even lethal means of formal control for "criminals" and "troublemakers." Similarly, Whitehead et al. (2018) argue that Christian nationalism's conflation of a subset of civic rights with "God's plan" for America inclines adherents, above and beyond sociodemographic and political identities, to oppose the expansion of firearms legislation. This research also demonstrates that this framework is associated with prioritizing expansive freedoms among those culturally framed as more authentically American, and particularly opposing infringements of abstract notions of liberty in the form of COVID-19 restrictions (Adler et al. 2021; Perry, Whitehead, and Grubbs 2021; Whitehead and Perry 2020b). Finally, Christian nationalism is also associated with approval for rights and practices that are believed to support cultural and social hierarchies including protection of gun rights (Du Mez 2020; Marti 2020), supporting government funding of border security and expansive criminal justice institutions (Davis 2019), and voting for candidates whom they feel are committed to combating

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the decline of Christian hegemony by supporting "religious freedom" (Perry et al. 2022).[1]

At the same time, however, white Christian nationalism is strongly associated with efforts to constrain the liberties of perceived outsiders. As a necessary component of Christian nationalism's framework constructing an image of "real Americans," it also implicitly and explicitly identifies those groups that are less entitled to the rights and privileges of American society. Prior research demonstrates that Christian nationalism predicts greater opposition to same-sex marriage, and restricting access to abortion services for women (Whitehead and Perry 2015, 2020a). Similarly, Cravens (2022) finds that Californians who report higher levels of Christian nationalist beliefs are less supportive of political leaders who identify as LGBT+, arguing that adherence to this ideology supports hetero and cisnormative conceptions of who is fit for leadership positions in America. Supporting this connection between beliefs that America is a "Christian nation" and adherence to more stringent sexual norms, Perry and Whitehead (2022) show that Christian nationalists are significantly more inclined to support bans on pornography across multiple sources of data.

Beyond influencing attitudes toward sexual morality, Christian nationalism's commitment to social order often inclines adherents to express desires for a more constrained vision of access to the political process. Civic engagement, particularly voting rights, has become increasingly framed as a "privilege" among republican voters and political representatives (Gomez and Doherty 2021). Supporting this understanding are beliefs that voting in the United States is "too easy," and that this allows for "rampant voter fraud" which are significantly more common among Americans who subscribe to Christian nationalism compared to other cross sections of the population (Perry, Whitehead, et al. 2022). This suggests that commitment to social order articulated within Christian nationalist mythos implicitly views broader access to civic influence as a threat. Furthermore, Davis and Perry (2021) find that among five historically marginalized groups Christian nationalism's emphasis on social order writ large is associated with preferences for more constrained speech for all groups. Yet, the implicit understanding that racists and militarists may be strategic allies along political and cultural lines leads Christian nationalists to prioritize their speech over communists, atheists, and homosexuals (see also Dahab and Omori 2019).

[1]While contemporary political discourses surrounding "religious liberties" tend to be framed within a color-blind discourse directed toward restricting access to abortion or opposition to marriage equality for LGBTQ, it has historically served as a thin veil protecting de jure segregation in the post Jim Crow South (Jones 2020; Tisby 2019). Moreover, Tisby (2019) documents how the post-Civil Rights era, white Evangelicals shifted their rhetoric away from explicit support for anti-miscegenation and school segregation policy, to instead frame racial separation as an issue of "free religious expression" in which the federal government could not impose racial integration.

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Taken together, research exploring Christian nationalism within the American political economy indicates that it simultaneously foments support for more "traditionalist" visions of America, while providing a framework to deemphasize the rights and privileges of perceived outsiders. In light of this, we explore the potential association between Christian nationalism and identification of specific rights outlined in the Constitution as the "most important." We outline our expectations of these relationships and our plan for formal analyses in the following sections.

Expectations

Given Christian nationalism's association with prioritization of social order, links to election conspiracy theory and beliefs that voting is "too easy" in the United States, as well as resistance to restrictions on "individual liberties," we expect Christian nationalism to be significantly tied to which rights respondents deem "most important" from the Bill of Rights.

Specifically, we expect that adults who more strongly adhere to Christian nationalist ideology will be less likely to support rights associated with liberal democracy including the freedom of the press—whom Donald Trump framed as the "true enemy of the people" (Wagner 2018)—and protections for free speech. However, given both the unique position of "freedom of speech" as particularly sacred in broad American culture and discourse, as well as an emergent debate among Americans on the meaning of "free speech," we expect this relationship to be more complex. Specifically, recent movements among those on the political left attempting to levy social and economic consequences against speech they deem hateful or vitriolic has sparked a counter movement from the political right against "wokeism" and "cancel culture" (New York Times 2022).

We would also expect the cultural framework of Christian nationalism to manifest itself in disregard for rights that might protect vulnerable populations who are more easily presented as threats (e.g., those suspected of criminal activity) and thus stifle efforts to maintain social order and hierarchy. Such rights include the right to a speedy and fair trial and protections against unlawful search and seizure. And because voting represents a pathway by which citizens can peaceably overthrow those in power, we also anticipate Christian nationalism would be negatively associated with defining voting as a "right" as opposed to a "privilege" that those in power can curtail or revoke. Finally, we expect Christian nationalism to bolster support for civil liberties that might be framed as bastions of a more traditional social order oriented about structure and individual liberties including the right to bear arms, freedom of religion, and an emphasis on states' rights.[2]

[2]In line with previous studies of Christian nationalism, we test possible racialized or gendered influences on respondents' identification of the "most important" right presented to them and find little evidence of such interactive effects in our analyses.

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METHODS

Data

Data for this study come from the Public Discourse and Ethics Survey (hereafter PDES) (Grubbs, Tosi, and Warmke 2019). There are eight waves of the PDES. For our analysis, we use data from two PDES waves: Wave 1, collected in August 2019 (for most controls) and Wave 8, collected in August 2021 (for Christian nationalism and views about rights). Survey waves were designed by the authors and the survey instrument was fielded by YouGov, an international research data and analytics company. YouGov recruits a panel of respondents through websites and banner ads.[3] These respondents are not paid directly but are entered into lotteries for monetary prizes. In order to draw a nationally representative sample, YouGov employs a method called "matching." Drawing a random sample from the American Community Survey, YouGov then matches a respondent in the opt-in panel who is the closest to the Census respondent based on key sociodemographic factors. Because of the specific recruitment and sampling design used by YouGov, the company does not publish traditional response rates. However, YouGov develops sampling weights to ensure the survey sample aligns with nationally representative norms for age, gender, race, education, and census region. Results from the PDES Wave 1 compare favorably with results from the 2018 General Social Survey on demographic factors such as age, gender, race, marital status, region, educational attainment, and evangelical affiliation (see Appendix table A1). The resulting original survey sample included 2,519 Americans who were matched and weighted. After sample attrition and listwise deletion of a modest number of cases with missing data, our final analytic sample consists of 1,137 cases. Looking at a comparison of demographics from the Wave 1 PDES and the analytical sample after attrition and listwise deletion (Appendix table A1) reveals only minor differences, suggesting that attrition and missing cases were not patterned, but random. For descriptive statistics of all variables in the models, see table 1.

Outcomes: Americans' Views on Rights

The outcomes for this study come from two measures used in Wave 8 of the PDES. For the first, we provided Americans with a list of 7 rights outlined in the Bill of Rights. These are: (1) freedom of speech, (2) freedom of the press, (3) freedom of religion, (4) the right to a speedy and fair trial, (5) the right to keep and bear arms, (6) rights not outlined as going to the federal government goes to the states, and (7) no unlawful searches or seizures. We then asked Americans to

[3]Due to non-response, the use of online non-probability surveys has increased in recent years and certain vendors are better than others (Kennedy et al. 2016). Independent evaluations of several vendors using online panels in comparison with traditional probability panels found YouGov "consistently outperformed the others including the probability-based [sample]" (Kennedy et al. 2016; Rivers 2016).

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TABLE 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Range	Mean or %	SD	Corr. with CN
Freedom of speech	0–1	40%		−.16***
Freedom of press	0–1	9%		−.28***
Freedom of religion	0–1	13%		.25***
Speedy and fair trial	0–1	5%		−.09**
Keep and bear arms	0–1	20%		.29***
States' rights	0–1	6%		.11***
No unlawful searches or seizures	0–1	9%		−.16***
"Conservative rights" (religion, guns, states rights)	0–1	38%		.46***
Voting is a right	0–1	69%		−.30***
Christian nationalism	0–28	13.1	8.2	
White	0–1	71%		−.05
Black	0–1	10%		.03
Hispanic	0–1	11%		.02
Other race	0–1	8%		.03
Male	0–1	45%		−.08*
Age	20–90	56.8	15.5	.22***
Education	1–6	3.4	1.5	−.24***
Income: Less than 30k	0–1	22%		.04
Income: 30k–60k	0–1	29%		.07*
Income: 60k–100k	0–1	22%		−.06*
Income: 100k–200k	0–1	14%		−.02
Income: over 200k	0–1	2%		−.05
Income: Did not say	0–1	11%		−.02
South	0–1	37%		.12***
Conservative ideology	1–5	3.1	1.2	.66***
Evangelical protestant	0–1	22%		.40***
Liberal protestant	0–1	13%		.01
Catholic	0–1	18%		.06
Other Christian	0–1	3%		.05
Other religion	0–1	12%		−.08**
Secular	0–1	31%		−.37***
Religious service attendance	1–6	2.7	1.7	.39***

Notes: PDES Waves 1 and 8 (N = 1,137).
*p < .05; ** p <.01; *** p < .001 (two-tailed test).

choose among these which they believed to be "the most important right." Because this variable indicates a single priority among rights outlined in the Constitution, and not an ordinal ranking of these rights, dichotomization of responses into a series of dummy variables is most appropriate (Long and Freese 2014). As a result,

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our analyses include seven dichotomous dependent variables where a value of (1) indicates respondents identification of a right as "most important," while a value of (0) indicates that a respondent believes some other listed right is most important. We then estimate binary logistic regression models estimating Christian nationalism's association with the likelihood that Americans believe _____ is the most important right vs. all the others.

Because initial bivariate analyses indicated that these outcomes fell predictably along patterned lines, we also created another binary outcome separating respondents who prioritized rights that were consistently selected by ideological and partisan conservatives and those who chose rights that were not. Specifically, respondents who indicated the "most important right" was freedom of religion, the right to keep and bear arms, or states' rights were coded 1, whereas all others who selected freedom of speech, freedom of the press, right to a speedy and fair trial, or no unlawful searches or seizures were coded 0.

For the last outcome, we use a single question from Wave 8 of the PDES in which we ask Americans simply whether they believe voting is a "privilege" or a "right." We code responses such that those who believe voting is a right = 1, privilege = 0. We estimate binary logistic regression models to estimate Christian nationalism's association with viewing voting as a right (something that shall not be infringed) rather than a privilege (something that can be limited or taken away entirely).

Christian Nationalism

While "Christian nationalism" has been measured in various ways (e.g., Al-Kire et al. 2021, 2022; Corcoran et al. 2021; McDaniel et al. 2011), the Christian nationalism scale used by Whitehead and Perry (2020a) has become the standard across disciplines like sociology, social psychology, and political science (Al-Kire et al, 2021, 2022; Armaly et al. 2022; Davis 2018). We use a slightly extended version adopted by Gorski and Perry (2022).

The Whitehead and Perry (2020a) scale includes six level-of-agreement questions with the statements: "The federal government should advocate Christian values," "The federal government should declare the United States a Christian nation," "The federal government should enforce strict separation of church and state (reverse coded)," The federal government should allow religious symbols in public spaces," "The federal government should allow prayer in public schools," and "The success of the United States is part of God's plan." Gorski and Perry's (2022) scale adds an additional statement: "I consider founding documents like the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution to be divinely inspired." Responses range from 0 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. Following previous research, we combine these measures into an additive scale ranging from 0 to 28, with higher scores indicating greater adherence to Christian nationalism (Cronbach's alpha = .91). The Christian nationalism measures used in these analyses appear on Wave 8 of the PDES. The average score is 13.1 (SD = 8) indicating most Americans hold views on Christian nationalism slightly below the scale's midpoint.

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Control Variables

In light of previous research on Americans' views of rights, we expect our outcomes to be highly correlated with political and religious characteristics. All controls come from Wave 1 of the PDES. For conservative political ideology, we use an ordinal measure ranging from very liberal = 1 to very conservative = 5. Religion controls include religious tradition and frequency of service attendance. Affiliation with a religious tradition is measured with six categories: Evangelical Protestant (reference), Liberal Protestant, Catholic, other Christian, other religions, and Seculars (including atheists, agnostics, and the unaffiliated).[4] Religious service attendance is measured from 1 = never to 6 = several times a week.

Sociodemographic controls from Wave 1 include variables for race, gender, family income, and region as well as a range for age and educational attainment. These categories are shown as binary indicators for race (white = reference, Black, Hispanic, other race), gender (male = 1), household income (less than $30,000 per year = reference, $30,000–59,999, $60,000–99,999, $100,000–199,999, $200,000 or more, did not report income), and region (Southern residence = 1). Age is measured in years from 20 to 82. And educational attainment ranges from 1 to 6 representing having completed less than a high-school diploma to a post-doctoral degree.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for all variables along with zero-order correlations between variables and Christian nationalism. Bivariate findings affirm that prioritizing particular rights falls consistently along predictable lines. Americans who score higher on Christian nationalism are more likely to believe that gun rights ($r = .29$, $p < .001$), religion ($r = .25$, $p < .001$), or states' rights ($r = .11$; $p < .001$) are the "most important right," while selecting freedom of the press ($r = -.28$, $p < .001$), free speech ($r = -.16$, $p < .001$), right to a speedy and fair trial ($r = -.09$, $p < .01$), or protection from unlawful searches and seizures ($r = -.16$, $p < .001$) are negatively associated with Christian nationalism. Unsurprisingly, Christian nationalism is positively associated with selecting "conservative rights" (gun rights, religion, and states' rights) as the most important ($r = .46$, $p < .001$).

[4]"Evangelical Protestants" are those respondents who indicated that they were "Protestant" and then on a separate question indicated they were "born again or evangelical." This measure is similar to that used by Pew and other polling firms, with the exception that polling firms also constrain this category further by specifying "white Born-again Protestants." Liberal Protestants, in contrast, are those Protestants who indicated they were not "born again or evangelical." "Other Christians" refers to Mormons and Eastern Orthodox Christians who do not have large enough numbers to be included separately but nonetheless should be included in the analysis. "Other religions" includes all non-Christian religious faiths (Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, etc.).

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Christian nationalism is also negatively associated with believing that voting is a right rather than privilege ($r = -.30$, $p < .001$). Given that these patterns are so intuitively associated with political ideology and racial identity, we turn to multivariate analyses.

Table 2 presents standardized coefficients from binary logistic regression models predicting which Americans would select each particular right as the "most important right" rather than the others.[5] As in the bivariate associations, Christian nationalism is significantly associated with each right in the expected directions, except for freedom of speech. However, an analysis of bivariate patterns suggested the association between Christian nationalism and prioritizing freedom of speech may be curvilinear. Thus, we also included a quadratic term in a separate model under freedom of speech. The main term was non-significant, but the quadratic term was significant and negative, indicating that past a certain threshold, higher scores on the Christian nationalism scale corresponded to a lower likelihood of prioritizing freedom of speech as the most important right. Figure 1 illustrates that curvilinear pattern. As Christian nationalism increases from the lowest point to the midpoint of the scale, the association with prioritizing freedom of speech stays rather flat, but then declines sharply past the midpoint, dropping from a predicted percentage of about 40% selecting freedom of speech as the most important right, to less than 20% at the highest values of Christian nationalism.

Other associations between Christian nationalism and prioritizing certain rights were quite linear.[6] Regarding both freedom of the press or a right to a speedy and fair trial, for example, Christian nationalism is negatively associated and is the strongest predictor in these models. In other models, Christian nationalism is among the leading predictors, often just behind factors like conservative political ideology. Associations all follow the directions observed at the bivariate level.

Figure 2 illustrates the preponderance of choosing each particular right by showing the distribution of predicted probabilities across quartiles of Christian nationalism (Whitehead and Perry 2020a).[7] While the plurality of Americans in the first three quartiles of Christian nationalism all select "freedom of speech" as the most important right, the plurality of those in the upper quartile of Christian nationalism (roughly 34%) say that gun rights are the most important, with roughly the same percentage choosing freedom of speech (28%) or freedom of religion (27%). The figure also clearly shows that as Americans increase in their adherence to Christian nationalist ideology, they are more likely to prioritize gun rights, freedom of religion, and states' rights, and deprioritize free speech, freedom

[5]Betas are x-standardized by transforming into z-scores, following Agresti (2007).

[6]Quadratic terms for Christian nationalism were also tested for other outcomes, and though some were statistically significant, a direct look at the patterns showed they were more linear than curvilinear.

[7]Though Whitehead and Perry (2020a) provide the helpful heuristic of Rejecters, Resisters, Accommodators, and Ambassadors to describe each quartile, we wish to focus simply on the distribution itself rather than the possible unique characteristics of Americans in each quartile.

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TABLE 2. Binary Logistic Regression Models Predicting Whether Americans Believe a Particular Right is the "Most Important Right."

	Freedom of Speech		Freedom of Press	Freedom of Religion	Speedy and Fair Trial	Keep and Bear Arms	States' Rights	Unlawful Searches or Seizures
Christian Nationalism	-.098	.383	-.859***	.478**	-.462*	.624***	.398+	-.532**
C. Nationalism[2]		-.512*						
Black	.025	.005	-.050	-.233+	.438***	-.305*	.184	.387***
Hispanic	-.025	-.024	-.092	.312*	.120	-.280*	.311*	-.196
Other race	.026	.020	-.165	-.132	.181	.016	-.153	.186+
Male	.040	.042	.011	-.552***	-.393*	.283**	.063	.100
Age	-.067	-.044	.499***	-.076	-.434*	.047	-.168	-.137
Education	.147+	.152*	-.013	.004	-.253	-.253*	.331*	-.120
Income: 30k-60k	-.123	-.119	.269+	-.185	.208	.143	-.082	-.019
Income: 60k-100k	.066	.066	.262	-.402**	.228	.190+	-.247	-.266+
Income: 100k-200k	-.008	-.008	.076	-.145	.252	.147	-.144	-.052
Income: over 200k	.173*	.171*	.019	-.307	-2.721	.030	-2.912	-.272
Income: didn't say	.106	.117	.104	-.248*	-.068	.027	.021	-.258+
South	-.135*	-.133*	.176	-.106	-.202	.148+	.218	-.037
Conservative Ideology	-.180*	-.190*	-.706***	.012	-.049	.778***	.352+	-.342*
Liberal Protestant	.205*	.180*	-.033	-.152	.059	-.021	-.190	.089
Catholic	.242**	.207*	.092	-.502***	.017	-.040	.215	.107
Other Christian	-.047	-.059	.115	.060	-.039	-.025	-.121	.188
Other religions	.097	.089	-.254	-.006	-.070	.139	-.238	.012
Secular	.160	.151	-.192	-.300+	-.303	.090	-.171	.320
Religious Attendance	-.001	.003	-.145	.782***	-.311	-.613***	-.151	.300+
Constant	-.410***	-.425***	-3.318***	-2.506***	-3.627	-2.058***	-3.566	-2.676
Nagelkerke R^2	.089	.094	.251	.317	.126	.309	.121	.162

Source: PDES Waves 1 and 8 (N = 1,137)
Note: Standardized logistic regression coefficients.
+ < p. 10; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001 (two-tailed tests)

of the press, right to a speedy and fair trial, and protection from unlawful searches and seizures.[8]

[8]We also examined whether observed associations were moderated by race or gender, following previous studies (e.g., Armaly et al. 2022; Perry, Whitehead, and Grubbs 2022; Perry and Schleifer 2022). We included interaction terms for Christian nationalism by each racial category and gender and the results indicate few significant associations. Compared to whites, Hispanics exhibit a slightly stronger correlation between Christian nationalism and prioritizing religious freedom and deprioritizing gun rights, but Black Americans show no significant differences. No gender interactions attain statistical significance at .05 or better. In ancillary models, we also tested for interactions with educational attainment and these terms were also non-significant.

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FIGURE 1. Predicted Percentage of Americans Who Prioritize "Freedom of Speech" Across Christian Nationalism Scores. Source: PDES Wave 8; August 2021.

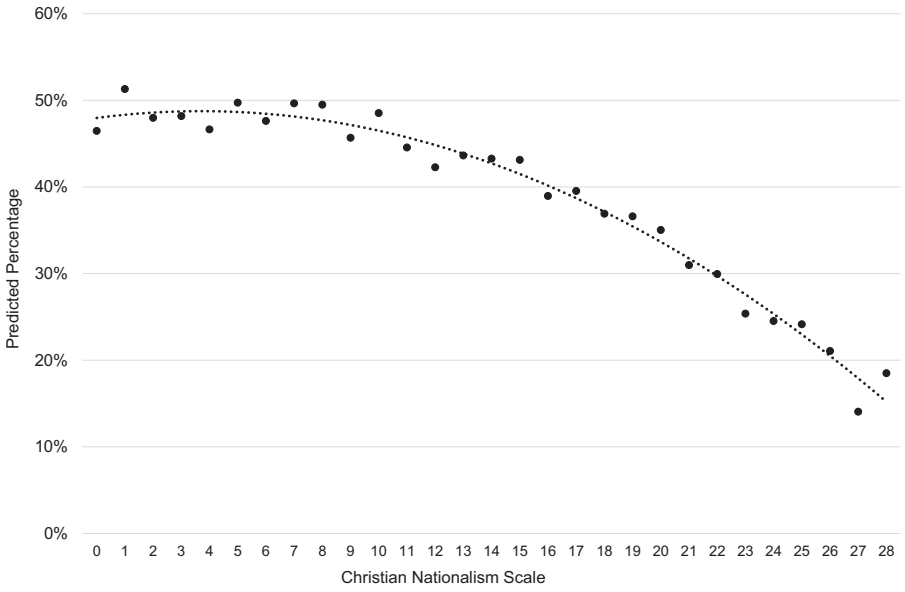
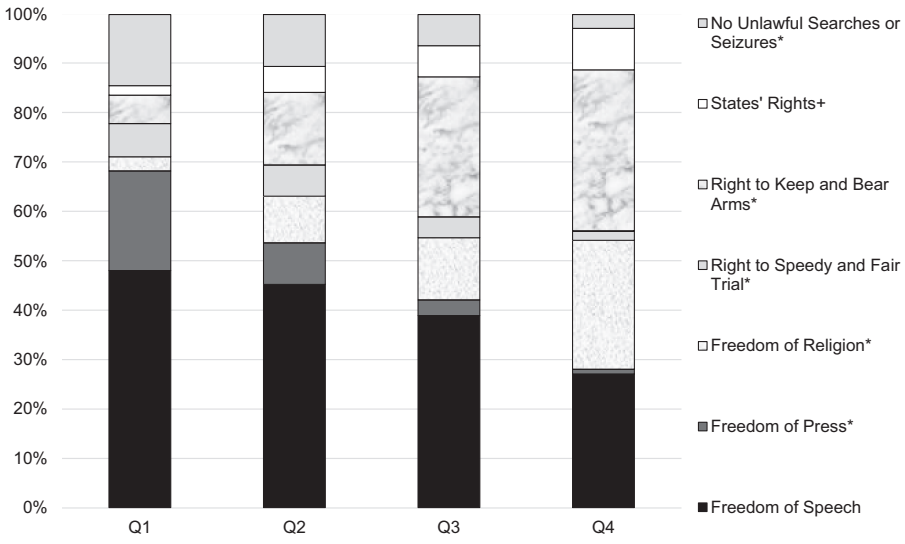


FIGURE 2. Predicted Percentage of Americans Who Believe a Particular Right is the "Most Important" Right Across Christian Nationalism Quartiles. Source: PDES Wave 8; August 2021. * Indicates Significant Association in Full Model at.05 or Beyond. + Indicates Marginal Association In Full Model Between .10 and .05.



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Because of small numbers of respondents who selected certain rights, we combined "conservative rights" into a broader category including gun rights, religious freedom, and states' rights. (The comparison category is those who chose the other rights like free speech, press, right to speedy and fair trial, and protection from unlawful searches and seizures). We also predict Americans' views on voting as a right or a privilege. Table 3 presents standardized coefficients from logistic regression models predicting each outcome. In the first model, Christian nationalism is the strongest predictor of selecting "conservative rights" as the most important rights. And in the second model, Christian nationalism is by far the strongest predictor of viewing voting as a privilege rather than a right.[9]

Figure 3 plots both outcomes across the full Christian nationalism scale and the patterns are stark. At the lowest values of Christian nationalism, roughly 90% of Americans view voting as a right. But at the highest values of Christian nationalism, the majority view voting as a privilege. Conversely, at the lowest values of Christian nationalism, less than 10% of Americans select the "conservative rights" as the most important. But at the highest values of Christian nationalism, over 80% choose these rights.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Americans often express profound disagreement as to what opportunities and resources should be considered "rights" versus privileges in society, as well as whether some enumerated rights are more important than others. Building on research associating Christian nationalist beliefs with support for formal means of social control (Davis 2018), desires to constrain freedom of speech for marginalized groups (Davis and Perry 2021), and beliefs that emphasize in-group liberty and out-group control (Davis 2019; Perry, Whitehead and Grubbs 2021; Whitehead, Schnabel and Perry 2018), we anticipated that Christian nationalism would prioritize rights historically linked to ideas of "liberty" by dominant majorities while deprioritizing rights that grant protections and subversive liberties to those outside of structural positions power. Our findings largely confirm our hypotheses. Christian nationalism was among the strongest predictors that Americans would prioritize "conservative rights" (freedom of religion, gun rights, states' rights) either separately or together, while deprioritizing rights like freedom of speech (past a certain threshold), the press, right to speedy and fair trial, and protection from unlawful searches or seizures. Christian nationalism was also the strongest predictor Americans viewing voting as a "privilege" rather than a "right."

Our findings extend research on Americans' understandings of "rights" as well as research investigating Christian nationalism in several important ways. First

[9]We also tested interaction terms for race and gender with Christian nationalism and the patterns we observe in table 3 are not moderated by race or gender.

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TABLE 3. Binary Logistic Regression Models Predicting Belief That Voting is a Right Rather Than a Privilege.

	Choose "conservative" rights (religion, guns, states' rights)	Voting is a right, not a privilege
Christian nationalism	.715***	.509***
Black	−.278	−.187
Hispanic	.102**	.098
Other Race	−.082	−.131
Male	−.022	−.350+
Age	−.025	−.036
Education	−.095	−.086
Income: 30k–60k	.013	.004
Income: 60k–100k	−.112	−.127
Income: 100k–200k	−.035	−.078
Income: over 200k	−.172	−.168
Income: Did not say	−.094	−.109
South	.155*	.148+
Conservative ideology	.635***	.162
Liberal protestant	−.213*	−.249**
Catholic	−.261**	−.287**
Other Christian	−.019	−.031
Non-Christian religion	−.006	−.019
Secular	−.159	−.190
Religious attendance	−.010	−.010
Constant	−.706***	−.927***
Nagelkerke R^2	.360	.379

Source: PDES Waves 1 and 8 (N = 1,137).
Note: Standardized logistic regression coefficients.
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests).

and foremost, the data clearly and consistently indicate that Americans' divergent views on whether to prioritize certain rights over others, or even to define certain civic activities as "rights," are not solely determined by political ideology but also by beliefs that center "Christianity" within America's deep story and future. Indeed, Christian nationalism was often a stronger predictor than conservative political ideology in its influence. In terms of religious factors shaping Americans' views about civil rights, Christian nationalism was almost always more substantively important than religious tradition and most often contributed more substantively than religious service attendance. Why is this the case? As work on "public religious expression" has argued, Christian nationalism represents a fundamentally different religious dynamic than personal religious identity or religiosity that is ultimately related to broader social order and power (Delehanty et al. 2019; Perry and Whitehead 2022; Stewart et al. 2018). In line with prior research from Whitehead and Perry (2020a), we also found that indicators of

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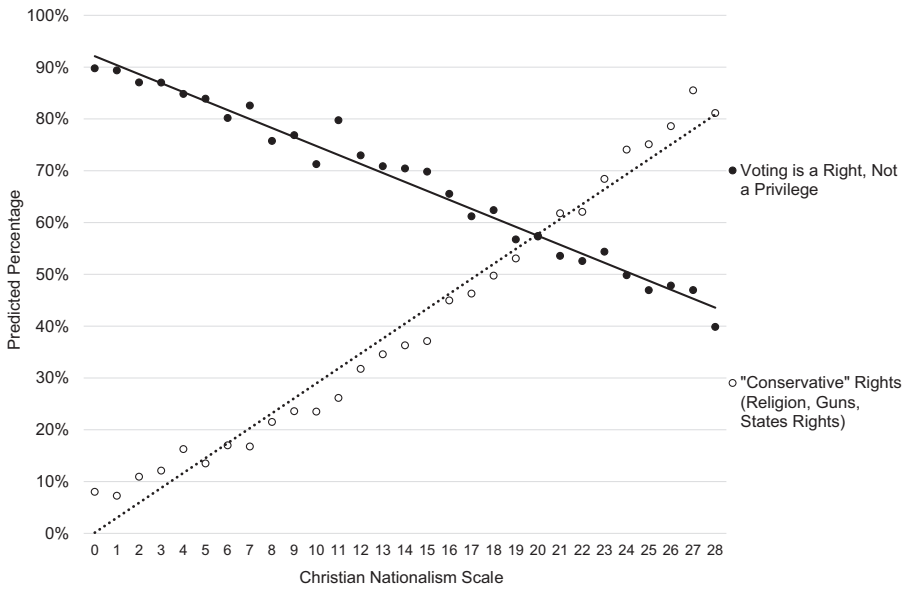
FIGURE 3. Predicted Percentage of Americans Who Prioritize "Conservative" Rights and Who Believe Voting is a "Right" Rather than a "Privilege" Across Christian Nationalism Scores. Source: PDES Wave 8; August 2021.



personal religiosity exhibit opposite directional associations to Christian nationalism when both are included in the model. This suggests that while religious commitment is often associated with conservative or reactionary political views, it is likely Christian nationalist ideology that accounts for that association. Once we hold that influence constant, our results indicate that religious commitment can exhibit a more liberalizing tendency.

Why does Christian nationalism relate to "rights" in a way that political ideology does not? Christian nationalism is fundamentally about American cultural membership and who rightfully deserves access to citizenship and civic participation. To those Americans who subscribe to Christian nationalism, "rights" are intended to protect "our" liberties, not those of deviants, usurpers, outsiders, or those who are "unworthy" (Perry et al. 2022). Yet Christian nationalism is also clearly different from "conservative" political ideology in that both remain powerfully significant predictors of emphasizing various rights. Though Christian nationalism is certainly a form of conservatism, it is possible that Christian nationalism captures a more explicit, reactionary "us vs. them" dynamic in American politics compared to the single-item measure of political ideology on its own.[10]

[10]Relatedly, it is also possible that indicators of Christian nationalism more effectively identify respondents for whom dogmatic and authoritarian social order is attractive compared to asking whether they identify as "liberal" or "conservative." Due to the pervasiveness of political and cultural attacks on "liberals" and "conservatives" within American spheres of discourse, it is possible that some (if not many) Americans who are "conservative" are more willing to express this under the umbrella of America's "religious heritage."

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An issue that is worth mentioning is that the associations were generally consistent across racial identity and gender. In contrast with numerous other studies (e.g., Armaly et al. 2022; Gorski and Perry 2022; Perry and Whitehead 2019; Perry et al. 2022), supplementary analyses showed black and white Americans did not diverge sharply in their patterns of association between Christian nationalism and political attitudes. And only Hispanics showed minor slope differences from whites. Meanwhile, the associations for men and women were largely the same except that Christian nationalist men were slightly more likely to prioritize "conservative" rights than women. Though enough research has shown that Christian nationalism's influence is often racialized and gendered, it is also common that various outcomes in such studies did not necessarily yield the same patterns. In this case, the issue may be due to smaller samples of racial minorities in the samples reducing the possibility of statistically significant interaction effects. Alternatively, the reason may also simply be that Christian nationalism's influence on how Americans prioritize and deprioritize various "rights" is more uniform in its tendency to elevate the rights that bolster in-group liberty and deprioritize "subversive" protections and rights. To our knowledge, research looking at Christian nationalism and the rights of gender or sexual minorities has never found a moderating effect of race or gender, and thus, we may simply be witnessing a similar pattern here (Whitehead and Perry 2015, 2019, 2020a).

Some data limitations should be acknowledged in order to chart a path for future research. First, the key variables come from Wave 8 of the PDES, making the analysis cross-sectional. As such we are unable to establish temporal precedent and strong causal claims must be made with caution. It is conceivable that Americans who hold certain views on fundamental rights are more inclined to favor political theologies like Christian nationalism that justify their prioritization (e.g., religious liberty). Though we would argue that our assumed causal ordering (Christian nationalism influencing the prioritization of certain rights over others) is more plausible and has more precedent in research, we acknowledge the possibility of bidirectional relationships.

Second, and as previously acknowledged, the structure of the dependent variables listed here do not allow us to explore the nuanced dimensions of why respondents believe their "most important" right should be prioritized. Individuals' understandings of civic rights are often more heavily influenced by cultural interpretations and frames situated within a complex array of personal memories and in-group out-group sentiments, rather than legal definitions and precedent (Chong 1993; Chong and Druckman 2007). Survey data, and especially that which is cross-sectional, is often ill-equipped to fully capture this nuance, and to explore contextual or cultural frames with appropriately rich data. We therefore urge future research to explore the relationships between religious and national identities with attitudes toward fundamental rights in more qualitative ways. Future studies would also ideally make use of temporal and experimental methods to order to establish causal direction more definitively. Finally, future studies could inquire about other "rights" issues that currently divide Americans,

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such as abortion rights, health care, welfare, privacy, and education. Though we have focused on more fundamental rights (voting, free speech, and religious liberty), many other opportunities and "entitlements" would be worth examining.

Our findings have particular relevance amidst the current political discussions about gun rights following numerous mass shootings, transgender rights, the fall of Roe, and increasing voter restrictions throughout the country. We have shown that Christian nationalist ideology seems to incline Americans toward authoritarian and anti-democratic views of "rights" that prioritize in-group liberty, such as freedom of religion (ours, not theirs, see Perry et al. 2022), gun rights, and states' rights. It also tends to deprioritize the rights and protections that either facilitate criticism of government leaders (free speech, free press, and voting rights) or limit the government's ability to suppress problem populations (right to speedy and fair trial, protection from unlawful searches and seizures). Given these patterns, we would expect Christian nationalism's role in contemporary debates over abortion, guns, and voter access to favor the liberty of historical majority groups (whites, conservative Christians, cisgender persons, and men) and to limit the rights of racial, religious, sexual, and gender minorities..

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TABLE A1. Comparison of PDES Analytic Sample and 2018 GSS on Key Demographic Variables.

	PDES W1 (2019) sample			PDES analytic sample			2018 GSS		
	Range	Mean or %	SD	Range	Mean or %	SD	Range	Mean or %	SD
Male	0–1	47%		0–1	45%		0–1	46%	
White	0–1	66%		0–1	71%		0–1	72%	
Black	0–1	12%		0–1	11%		0–1	15%	
Latino	0–1	14%		0–1	11%				
Asian	0–1	3%		0–1	2.4%				
Other race	0–1	5%		0–1	4.6%		0–1	13%	
Age	18–90	52.8	15.9	20–91[a]	56.7	15.5	18–89	46.6	17.7
Married	0–1	52%		0–1	52%		0–1	49%	
BA degree or higher	0–1	33%		0–1	31%		0–1	31%	
South	0–1	38%		0–1	37%		0–1	40%	
Northeast	0–1	17%		0–1	17%		0–1	15%	
Midwest	0–1	22%		0–1	22%		0–1	21%	
West	0–1	23%		0–1	24%		0–1	24%	
Full-time employed	0–1	37%		0–1	35%		0–1	50%	
Republican	0–1	28%		0–1	28%		0–1	35%	
Democrat	0–1	36.2		0–1	36.1		0–1	43%	
Other	0–1	35.9		0–1	36		0–1	22%	
Born-again/ evangelical Prot.	0–1	22%		0–1	22%		0–1	23%	

[a] The original range for respondents began at 18 years old, but by Wave 8 of the PDES, there had been a 2 year lapse. Thus respondents were all 20 years old or older.

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